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SUBJECT: MALAWI: THE NEW AU CHAIRMAN OUTLINES HIS PLANS

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SUMMARY

[11](#). (SBU) New African Union Chairman Bingu wa Mutharika summoned the diplomatic corps and heads of international organizations in Lilongwe to brief them on his plans for the AU. Noting that he had only eleven months left in his AU tenure, Mutharika stated that he plans to be "action oriented." Business as usual at the AU - characterized by resolutions and studies with little to show for the effort - will be a thing of the past, he said. Mutharika outlined four focus areas for his chairmanship: peace and security; food security; roads and transport infrastructure; and energy and climate. He acknowledged he would need cooperation from the international community to be successful. Referring to the important roles played by international partners in Malawi, Mutharika said, "You have always been there for us, and we ask for your help again now." He made a specific request for funding support to defray costs related to his chairmanship. End summary.

A RELAXED BINGU SPEAKS

[12](#). (SBU) True to his word (reftel), Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika invited the diplomatic corps and heads of international organizations in Malawi to State House to brief on his plans as AU Chairman. Mindful that he had only eleven months to work on his agenda, an unusually relaxed and self-confident Bingu talked about his priorities and stressed the need for cooperation. He was emphatic the he could not be successful without the assistance of the diplomatic community and Malawi's development partners.

PROGRESS ON PEACE AND SECURITY

[13](#). (SBU) Mutharika provided a tour d' horizon of the peace and security hotspots in Africa, specifically mentioning the DRC, Somalia, Madagascar, Zimbabwe and Sudan. He stated that he plans to be involved in bringing about lasting solutions, noting that the entire continent's development was being held back by conflict in these problem areas.

[14](#). (SBU) Mutharika noted his intention to engage on Zimbabwe as AU

Chairman, which is particularly noteworthy given his historic reluctance to press the Mugabe regime. He also intends to travel to Sudan to get a better sense of the situation on the ground there. He noted the upcoming referendum, stating it was critical that all the parties involved accept its results. He added that if the referendum results in an independent southern Sudan, final implementation will require detailed discussions and agreements on the trans-shipment of goods to the new nation. He will be particularly focused on this issue as any resolution would likely occur during his tenure.

15. (SBU) Mutharika also discussed the upcoming general election in Sudan, indicating that, as best he could tell, there were at least 13 candidates and 72 political parties. He would be looking to partners that have experience in building democratic institutions to help ensure a free and fair election, he said.

16. (SBU) On Madagascar, Mutharika lamented that the current SADC agreement was being all but ignored by the current president and stated that it was time to pressure him to "get back to business" and work towards general elections.

17. (SBU) The President touched on Somalia briefly, highlighting

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the issues of piracy and al-Qaeda's presence there. He committed himself to deal with these challenges effectively. Mutharika also mentioned the need for more robust peacekeeping planning and operations, noting that Malawi had a battalion that was trained, but was unable to deploy due to "problems with procuring equipment." (Note: Reftel reports Mutharika's other recent comments regarding Malawi's peacekeeping equipment issues. End note.)

BINGU ENDORSES U.S. FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE

18. (SBU) On food security, one of Mutharika's favored subjects, he made an impassioned argument that it should be a primary focus. He reiterated his goal that within five years, no child should die of hunger in Africa. He was adamant that this was achievable, and that Africa should be able not only to feed itself, but also to feed the world. Mutharika praised President Obama's recent call to action embodied in the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative and its focus on growing food, as opposed to providing food aid. He said the issue of food security should be dealt with on a regional basis - not nation by nation - and that strategies need to focus on staple foods that are familiar to Africans.

ROADS AND TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

19. (SBU) Mutharika expressed satisfaction with the recently concluded AU summit's focus on infrastructure development. He was embarrassed that Africa was endowed with a plethora of "roads to nowhere." He contrasted the current state of Africa's transport infrastructure with that of the United States, remarking on the ease of quickly driving from the Atlantic to the Pacific, or from Canada to Mexico. Mutharika then commented that without good roads and transport infrastructure, true food security was impossible.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

¶10. (SBU) Mutharika called for expanded exploration of all energy technologies - wind, hydro, solar, geothermal - to obtain the energy needed for Africa's development. He highlighted the need for a continental electrical grid. Such a grid would allow for easy trading of electrical energy between countries, but he added no country could tackle the project on its own. Mutharika made a special plea for assistance in developing a databank on energy generation potential, existing infrastructure and food production capabilities to ensure better strategic and integrated regional planning in these areas. He noted that all of this required information technology expertise that was scarce in Africa, but that the donor community could provide it.

IMPASSIONED PLEA FOR COOPERATION

¶11. (SBU) Mutharika made an impassioned plea for cooperation and help saying, "Please assist us. Please assist me." With uncharacteristic humility, he added, "In the past, Malawi passed through difficult years. It would not have been possible to do so without your help." He said he and his government were open to suggestions on how to move forward and he hoped that the diplomatic and development communities would continue to engage with him.

SPECIFIC ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

¶12. (SBU) Moving to specifics, Mutharika asked for funding to

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support his travel budget. He explained how he would be travelling frequently in his new role and gave a detailed justification for the GOM's recent purchase of a new jet, saying that travel for AU business would be impossible without it. He emphasized that a detailed cost-benefit analysis had been done which found that it would be cheaper to purchase a jet than to charter one. He also predicted that his government would be required to host countless visitors and conferences, and that this amounted to an unfunded mandate that came with the Chairmanship. He sought assistance in this regard also.

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) President Mutharika appeared surprisingly relaxed and comfortable dealing with the detailed subject matter discussed at the AU summit, and asking for help. He noted that he would be forming a task force to deal with AU issues as they arose and welcomed foreign participation in the group.

¶14. (SBU) While he acknowledged the limited time and resources available to get things done during his one-year tenure, it was clear that Mutharika hopes to leave his mark on the continent. Having won a second term as Malawi's President and now being selected for AU Chairman, he is focused on constructing a tangible and lasting legacy. Where this desire to be effective aligns with USG policy, we may be able to use this to our advantage. We look forward to working with the Department and the AU mission to take utilize fully the opportunities presented by Mutharika's chairmanship.
BODDE